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LONDON FOR GAYLE; BERLIN FOR PAETZOLD; BAKU FOR HAUGEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#)
SUBJECT: DISSIDENT CLERIC PREVENTED FROM LEAVING IRAN

REF: A. RPO DUBAI 0052; B. RPO DUBAI 0050

CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian L Burns, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, Dubai, US Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S) Summary: The Iranian government seized dissident Iranian cleric Mohsen Kadivar's passport just before he boarded a plane to Dubai to apply for a US visa. Kadivar, who has been imprisoned in the past for his theological criticisms of the Iranian system of government, was informed that the Special Court for Clergy had put a travel ban on him. He is in the process of trying to have his passport restored so he can travel for a year's fellowship at the University of Virginia. In light of this and several other similar cases, IRPO recommends a statement condemning the Iranian government's practice of seizing passports of some Iranians traveling to and from the US, without citing specific cases. End summary

2.(S) The Iranian government prevented preeminent reformist religious scholar and outspoken critic of velayat-e faqih Mohsen Kadivar from leaving Iran August 16 and seized his passport. As relayed to IRPO by a US intermediary, two hours before his flight from Imam Khomeini Airport, authorities took Kadivar's passport and told him to report the following week to intelligence to claim his passport. Kadivar learned for the first time that in February 2007, the Special Court for Clergy had put a travel ban on him. On August 20, he reported to an intelligence office called the "passport branch of the Presidency Office," where he was told to go to the Special Court for Clergy. At the court, he was told to fill out an application to try to cancel the travel ban and to call August 25 for an update.

3.(S) Kadivar was on his way to Dubai to apply for a US visa to spend a year's sabbatical at the University of Virginia. When he didn't show up for his visa appointment, IRPO informed UVA. His point of contact at UVA there later forwarded to IRPO Director Kadivar's email detailing what had happened to him. Kadivar indicated he was not optimistic that his situation will be resolved soon.

4.(U) Kadivar has written extensively on systems of government according to Shiite theology, and he has openly questioned the Islamic Republic of Iran's doctrine of velayat-e faqih. After receiving a sentence of 18 months for his critical writings, he was released in 2000 from Evin Prison.

5.(S) Kadivar's case is one of several that IRPO has learned about in which the Iranian government has confiscated the passports of Iranians traveling to or from the US, in addition

to the well-publicized case of dual citizen Parnaz Azima. The first two sets involve either USG funded travel or links to a think tank accused by Iran of being part of the USG "soft revolution" conspiracy. A group of Iranian documentary filmmakers returning from an IVLP program had their passports taken upon their return after they had defied authorities and participated in the program (Ref A). Also, a political science professor, who spent a year at National Endowment for Democracy (NED) before teaching at a US university, had his passport taken away after returning to Iran on a visit. (Ref B) He was also dismissed from his Iranian university. Kadivar's case is somewhat different, in that the purpose of his travel is not related to any entity - USG or other - that the Iranian government has accused of promoting a soft revolution in Iran. However, what sets him apart from ordinary academic exchanges is that he is a very well-known and controversial figure in Iran.

6.(S) Comment: UVA has asked that the USG not to make a specific public statement about Kadivar's case for the time being, out of concern that doing so could preclude a speedy resolution of his situation. It is very likely that if the USG named Kadivar by name, the Iranian government would jump to the conclusion that we are the real sponsor of Kadivar's fellowship to the US and mostly likely Kadivar would be prevented from traveling, and possibly arrested and imprisoned. Instead, we recommend a statement on the practice of seizing passports that omits specifics. We can expand the guidance regarding dual citizen Parnaz Azima who is in a similar situation to add language saying we also deplore the Iranian government's practice of seizing passports of some non-dual citizen Iranians traveling to or from the US. Because the other cases involve people whose cases are not publicly known - unlike in the case of a political prisoner - and who have no other citizenship, they stand to face greater retribution if the USG identifies them publicly. Should Kadivar - or the others - ask for such a statement, we can later supply details.

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